

## Special Meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission

*Proposed Minutes*

- Date:** March 21, 2007
- Time:** 4:00 p.m.
- Place:** Conference Room D, Fillmore St. Complex
- Present:** Paul Geerlings, Bobbi Jones Sabine, Roger E. Jonas, Betty Gajewski, Mark Oppenhuizen and Phil Kuyers
- Absent:** Ted Bosgraaf, Crystal Unema, Joyce Kortman and Russell V. Brown, Jr.
- Staff:** John A. Scholtz, Director; Curt TerHaar, Coordinator of Park Planning & Development; Dave Mazurek, Park Operations Superintendent; and Diane L. Huhn, Parks Secretary
- Guests:** Joy Seeley, Harvey DeRidder, Richard and Laura Fletcher, Philip and Judi Molhoek, and Steve Struck

### **Subject: Olive Shores Grant Application**

- PR 07-022 Motion: To approve the resolution authorizing submittal of a grant proposal to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund for the Olive Shores Acquisition Project and forward to the Board of Commissioners.
- Moved by: Jonas Supported by: Sabine Unanimous

### Other Items Discussed:

Scholtz distributed a list of proposed equipment and personnel needs for inclusion in the 2008 budget proposal. Commission members reviewed and discussed the list. Scholtz explained computer equipment needs including equipment replacement and a new computer to be shared by park supervisors at the Park Operations Center. Scholtz also described proposed replacement of two existing high mileage  $\frac{3}{4}$  ton pick-up trucks. Mazurek explained his desire to replace the gas vehicles with trucks with diesel engines to improve their pulling capacity as well as improve their gas mileage. Mazurek was questioned as to whether the diesel engines would be able to burn bio-diesel fuel. Mazurek indicated he was unsure and Commission members urged him to seek that capability to further improve upon fuel savings.

Mazurek explained the proposal to add additional steps in the seasonal wage system. Currently there are only two-steps for seasonal wages and Mazurek indicated he would like to explore the possibility of a five-step system. The plan is to work with the Human Resource Department to explore what type of system would work best. The goal is to be able to encourage employees to return for additional years to benefit from their experience and expertise. Mazurek indicated an important key to success is having returning employees who can help train the new employees and have experience in handling unusual situations. Kuyers asked what the estimated cost of the additional wage steps would be and Mazurek estimated a total cost not to exceed \$2,500 per year.

Scholtz described the proposed Stewardship Work Crew which would be a new four person crew with a supervisor charged with a range of stewardship responsibilities including invasive species control, dune grass planting and dune stabilization, tree planting and a range of other activities. Scholtz explained we have been using SWAP Crews and volunteer labor sources to address this problem but the need for invasive species work in particular is growing rapidly and no more SWAP time has been available. Also, parks work in terms of park clean-up and other early season activities is at a peak in the early spring when much of the invasive species control, particularly garlic mustard, requires the most attention. Commission members reviewed a proposed budget worksheet for the proposed stewardship work crew which showed a cost of approximately \$40,000 per year and includes a van to transport the crew and their equipment. Mazurek estimated there could be savings of up to \$20,000 from reduced park attendant hours and a decrease in the SWAP budget for hours which we have not been able to fulfill in recent years. Commission members asked how long the invasive species work is likely to last. Scholtz responded that garlic mustard has at least a seven year life for its seed bank which suggests that we have many more years with garlic mustard control ahead. Also, new sources of garlic mustard are continually coming into the parks which means there will always be new garlic mustard outbreaks unless it is eliminated County-wide. There are many other invasive species to control in addition to garlic mustard and new invasives moving into the area on a continual basis. Oppenhuizen suggested it is likely the crew will never be out of work. Commission members expressed general support for the equipment and personnel as proposed and Scholtz indicated he will work with Mazurek to put together a final proposal to be submitted to the Fiscal Services Department by March 30, 2007. The Commission will receive a summary of the proposal at its April 11, 2007 meeting and the possibility will exist to make changes if desired at that time.

Oppenhuizen called for discussion of the Commission's Strategic Plan including its Mission Statement, Goals and Objectives. Scholtz indicated the County is moving towards a performance based budgeting system. This new system will require the Mission Statement, Goals and Objectives to be written in a manner which will facilitate the development of performance measures. Scholtz noted that the existing goals which the Parks Commission has adopted in its long-range park plan are not necessarily valid in terms of the new system. Goals should be outcome based and many of the current Commission goals are more related to the process by which the Commission seeks to achieve the outcomes. For example, the first goal we have is to "provide a high level of

maintenance, operation and management of all park properties to ensure the enjoyment and safety of visitors.” Scholtz indicated that providing a high level of maintenance and operation of the parks is not the ultimate outcome desired, but a means of achieving the outcome. Scholtz distributed a draft proposal including a revised mission statement and a proposed revised goals. Commission members began with discussion of the mission statement and Jonas noted he has been involved with groups that have spent an entire year working on a mission statement. Gajewski suggested the words “wide range” be eliminated from the mission statement so that it would read as follows, “The Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission will enhance the quality of life for residents and visitors to Ottawa County by preserving parks and open spaces and by providing natural resource based recreation and education opportunities.” Scholtz reviewed the three goals as drafted and Gajewski suggested switching Goal A and Goal B so that preservation of land would be the first goal with the provision of recreation opportunities logically following that goal. Scholtz next commented that as currently written the goals do not include any references to financial management or providing cost effective services which has been emphasized in the past and should be incorporated into the mission and goals statements. Gajewski suggested adding a Goal D which could be written to incorporate these financial goals.

Following further discussion of the proposed financial goal, Oppenhuizen called for a brief break preceding the pre-announced 5:00 p.m. public meeting to present and take public comment on the proposed Olive Shores Acquisition grant proposal.

At 5:00 p.m. Oppenhuizen called the public meeting to order to discuss the proposed Olive Shores Acquisition grant proposal to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund. He called upon Scholtz to summarize the grant proposal.

Scholtz explained the Parks Commission’s basic interest in preserving additional land in Ottawa County due to the rapid population growth with total population expected to exceed 390,000 people by the year 2020. He explained the Parks Commission has always placed an extremely high priority on acquiring additional Lake Michigan access and preserving our unique dunes and shoreline. A guideline has been established of 500 feet to indicate the amount of frontage which would be desired in terms of establishing a new Lake Michigan park. In studying the shoreline there are very few, if any opportunities left to acquire additional lakefront with the exception of the properties targeted in the grant application. Scholtz explained the Parks Commission acquired a 200 foot section of shoreline in 2001 in Port Sheldon Township with the understanding it would have an opportunity to seek to expand the site in the future with other adjacent undeveloped land. The Parks Commission has worked hard with the adjacent landowners in recent years to reach agreement on possible purchase and option agreements have been approved to ensure the Commission an opportunity to acquire these properties if grant funds are awarded. Scholtz explained there is the 438 foot waterfront parcel immediately south of the Parks Commission’s property which is targeted for purchase and also a 100 foot parcel immediately north of the Parks Commission’s property providing an opportunity to establish a new park with 738 feet of Lake Michigan frontage. Scholtz explained the financial aspects of the proposed property purchase and explained that

option fees already paid would apply to the purchase price but would not be eligible for grant reimbursement. Scholtz explained if successful with the acquisition the Parks Commission would go through a formal master planning process in the future to create a plan for future use of the property with inclusion of public comment and involvement of the neighbors as well as the general public. However, the granting authority requires a preliminary concept plan at this point in the process to demonstrate how the property will be used if it is successfully acquired. Scholtz asked Curt TerHaar to explain the concept plan in detail.

TerHaar explained the site has some similarities to the Parks Commission's Rosy Mound Park in that there is a significant dune feature to traverse prior to reaching the shoreline. A 50 car parking lot is deemed adequate to accommodate the projected park users and will help ensure the site is not over-used. TerHaar explained that picnic tables and restrooms would be provided near the parking area along with a series of looped trails that would be handicap accessible leading visitors to the dune and including interpretative signs to explain the back dune environment. Scholtz explained an important goal of the Parks Commission is to restrict people to identified trails and boardwalks to limit impact to the sensitive dune environment. Scholtz explained the Parks Commission has had excellent success at its existing park sites keeping people on trails and boardwalks through dunes. Oppenhuizen asked whether the Parks Commission would be required to obtain DEQ permits and TerHaar explained that the County is required to obtain permits and meet all DEQ dune regulations. TerHaar proceeded to explain the remaining features in the plan including the stairway leading up and over the dune with overlooks on top and beach access on the west side of the dune. TerHaar explained the stairs would be of an accessible design which has been used successfully at Rosy Mound which encourages use by persons with some mobility limitations.

Oppenhuizen indicated the Commission has received a letter from a Mrs. Helen Hunting regarding the proposed acquisition project. Oppenhuizen read the letter to the Commission and the audience in which Mrs. Hunting expressed opposition to the proposed park acquisition. Mrs. Hunting, a neighbor living north of the proposed park, stated her opposition to the project and listed a number of questions which she would like answered. Scholtz indicated he would write a letter responding to each of the questions raised by Mrs. Hunting. Scholtz indicated he received a phone call from a John Edison, also a neighbor to the park, who questioned the need for additional park land and expressed concern regarding traffic congestion. Scholtz indicated that Mr. Edison concluded that he "objects to the project but not harshly." He indicated he understands the logic in purchasing the property now but questions the need for public use of the area in the immediate future.

Scholtz indicated he also received a phone message from a Mary DeBoer who expressed her opposition to the acquisition on the basis that this is a beautiful, pristine dune property that would be ruined if it is developed into a park. She also indicated she was not happy to receive the notice of the meeting on Saturday for a meeting on the following Wednesday.

Oppenhuizen called upon Harvey DeRidder who expressed an interest in addressing the Commission on the matter. Mr. DeRidder indicated he is a member of the West Ottawa Christian Reformed Church which owns 20 acres immediately across Olive Shores Drive. He indicated the church feels it has a deeded right to walk across this property to Lake Michigan. He indicated they have no immediate plans to do so but wondered whether the Commission was aware of its interest. He further stated he has no objections to the park but wanted to find out more about what was being proposed. Scholtz indicated that it was quite possible that the church has a deeded right to access the route up the old road grade to the dune top and down to the beach. He suggested the church use the future park stairs and access the beach as members of the general public. DeRidder questioned whether they would have the right to walk the park trail and use these stairs to the beach if it was a fee park? Scholtz indicated that it is typical for the Parks Commission to designate its Lake Michigan beaches as fee areas requiring motor vehicle parking fees. However, these fees only apply to motor vehicles and persons walking from church property across the street would not have to pay a fee. Geerlings suggested there could be a problem with park hours with members of the church wanting to use the park after park hours. DeRidder indicated the church would have no problem complying with park hours.

Mr. Struck indicated he owns property to the south and questioned whether there is truly a need for additional park space given the density of parks in the area already. He questioned why the Parks Commission was focusing all of its parks in one area and also noted the potential traffic problems on Olive Shores Drive when the Consumers Energy plant has a shift change. Scholtz explained the Parks Commission finds that people are willing to travel great distances to access Lake Michigan parks and the proximity to Kirk Park is not a significant issue. Township parks in Port Sheldon Township are only open to Port Sheldon Township residents and therefore cannot serve the needs of general County residents and visitors from outside Ottawa County.

Oppenhuizen called upon Phil Molhoek to address the Commission. Mr. Molhoek explained that Helen Hunting's letter covered most of the key issues he wanted to address. He indicated he has great concern that the park will negatively impact the new eagle nest on the property and he has spoken with Becky Humphries of the DNR who indicated she is also concerned. Mr. Molhoek also expressed the opinion that it is a very special natural area with a wide range of wildlife and beautiful plants and including trillium which grows on the dune. He has lived in his cottage for 31 years and they purchased the property for the serenity and security of the area. If a park is developed he will immediately lose \$500,000 in value. Molhoek indicated he sees the potential for up to two hundred people to occupy the 700 feet of beach and he indicated he feels that would disturb his privacy.

Discussion next focused on the eagle's nest that Mr. Molhoek indicated now exists on the property. Scholtz indicated he was not aware of an eagle's nest on the property. Molhoek indicated it is the first year for the nest and it is located in a tall white pine on the dune top near the southern edge of the Seidman property. Scholtz indicated this would be explored further.

Scholtz indicated he is surprised that people feel the park would have a greater impact on the site's natural features than a housing development. Scholtz explained the history of the Rosy Mound acquisition and he reported that neighbors to this property were very concerned when the park was proposed and they indicated a desire to have the property stay as it was without any park establishment or future development. Scholtz stated that was not an option for Rosy Mound and that it is not an option for the Seidman property either in that if not dedicated as a park it will be developed with housing. Scholtz indicated that housing development would have a much greater detrimental impact on the natural features of the site than a park. Mr. Molhoek indicated a private development might involve up to twelve homes but that would not involve fifty cars. Scholtz indicated that twelve houses with garages and dogs barking and people coming and going would have a tremendous impact on the site. Oppenhuizen indicated that Ottawa County Parks will be a good neighbor and has demonstrated this at all of its County parks including those along the shoreline. Geerlings suggested they contact neighbors of our existing parks to find out what kind of neighbor Ottawa County Parks actually is.

Next Oppenhuizen called upon Mrs. Laura Fletcher to address the Commission. Mrs. Fletcher is concerned about loss of privacy and people walking on their beach. Scholtz indicated that property lines would be very clearly marked and people would be encouraged to stay on park property. Mrs. Fletcher asked if beach fires would be allowed at the future park and Oppenhuizen indicated that no fires are allowed on beaches within Ottawa County Parks. Mr. Molhoek asked whether the park hours are actively enforced or if the gates are just locked. Scholtz indicated that 99% of the time the closing of the parking lot eliminates all people from the park. If problems arise where people are accessing the park outside of park hours the Parks Commission would work closely with the Ottawa County Sheriff's Department to patrol the park and eliminate after hours use. Mazurek, Ottawa County Park Operations Superintendent, spoke up to indicate that the Parks Commission has had very good success in eliminating after hours use. The Rosy Mound property, when it existed as a private property in an undeveloped state, was a huge party location and the Parks Commission has been successful in eliminating those types of problems. Mrs. Fletcher expressed concerns about people accessing the property by boat. Geerlings explained that Ottawa County Parks does not allow alcoholic beverages and one call to the Sheriff's Department would result in boaters with alcoholic beverages being removed from the park. Oppenhuizen indicated Ottawa County Parks has done an excellent job in managing and maintaining its parks and this will be the case with a future park at this location as well.

Mrs. Molhoek spoke up and said that no matter what the neighbors want, the Parks Commission is going to go ahead with the park project and grant application. Oppenhuizen indicated the Parks Commission is very interested in the viewpoints of the neighbors but is also concerned about the interests of other residents in Ottawa County. The input being received tonight is one important step in the process but there has been much other planning undertaken as well and other comments received from the public during the long-range parks planning process expressing interest and support for additional Lake Michigan frontage and dune preservation. Geerlings underscored those

comments indicating the Parks Commission has done a great deal of research including County resident surveys where we have learned that people support the acquisition of additional land on Lake Michigan. The Parks Commission has also learned that parks add value to adjacent properties. Oppenhuizen again encouraged the people present to talk to other people living near other Ottawa County Parks to get their opinions. A comment was made that the Parks Commission is grouping all of its Lake Michigan sites in one location. Scholtz indicated the Parks Commission would ideally have parks equally distributed along the shoreline but this simply is not possible. The Parks Commission has to go where the key natural resource features exist. Fortunately, the Commission has a fairly good distribution of parks along the shoreline. Opportunities are quite limited as to the potential for creating new parks. Scholtz noted that Genesee County Parks has nearly all of its prime park acreage located in one general location because that is where the key natural resource features exist.

Oppenhuizen explained that the Parks Commission's parks are much different than the township's parks and this park will be totally different than Port Sheldon Township's Windsnest Park. Oppenhuizen indicated the Parks Commission is seeking significant resource-base recreation opportunities and this is a very special natural area which will be of great interest to park visitors.

Mr. Molhoek asked about the time frames for the grant submittal and review. Oppenhuizen explained the grant would be submitted to meet an April 2, 2007 grant deadline with a review by grant inspectors sometime over the summer. Oppenhuizen indicated the Trust Fund Board would review the grants and make announcements later in the fall as to projects recommended for funding. Actual implementation of the project would not occur until the following year in late 2008. Scholtz explained to the group that the Commission is seeking grant funds to assist with the acquisition and failure to receive the grant does not necessarily mean the Parks Commission will not move forward and purchase the property.

Following further discussion, the Parks Commission approved the resolution authorizing submittal of the grant application and forwarded the matter to the Board of Commissioners for their review and support. Oppenhuizen thanked people for attending and sharing their views on the proposed acquisition project.

Oppenhuizen next called for further discussion of the Parks Commission's Long Range Goals and Objectives.

Joy Seeley addressed the Commission and explained she is representing the Georgetown Off-leash Dog Park Supporters. She indicated she has information available on the benefits of off-leash dog areas. As an Allendale resident, she stated there is a definite need for places to walk dogs off-leash with the rapid development in Ottawa County. She added she strongly supports the Commission's efforts to expand the park and open space system. She stated she supports the Olive Shores Acquisition project and acquiring more land on Lake Michigan.

Commission members with staff guidance continued to go through the goals and objectives with Scholtz providing draft objectives and draft performance measures for each objective. A variety of suggestions were made to improve upon the goals as drafted and staff will produce a revised document for a presentation at the April 11, 2007 Parks Commission meeting. Staff will share the draft document with Gajewski prior to the meeting to get her review and input prior to sharing with the full Commission.

Oppenhuizen next called for discussion of the Park 12 bikepath issue. TerHaar reviewed plans showing the status of the planning for the bikepath and its impact on neighboring landowners. Scholtz indicated it will be important to come to some resolution as to the Commission's willingness to accommodate parking by neighbors either on park parcels or providing access through park land for vehicles to access their cottages. Gajewski questioned the potential for these decisions to impact all other parking decisions throughout the Park 12 area. Kuyers urged staff to notify those who would be impacted by the decisions and encourage them to attend the next Commission meeting to discuss this in more detail. Staff will do additional research and seek input from Bosgraaf and Kortman prior to the April 11, 2007 Commission meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.